



Great Plains States: Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Dakota

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Overview

These states are grouped together because of their similar history and background. Most of the Great Plains states were included in the Louisiana Purchase. These states have similar migration and settlement patterns, similar county jurisdictions, similar economies, and are also similar in the types of records that were created by federal and state governments. The following four record types will be discussed: church, census, land, and military. Federal records will not be discussed in this presentation, including government vital records.

History and Background

Early settlement and migration

The most common settlement and migration patterns in the Great Plains were travel to the area from other states by canals, rivers, lakes and trails. Migration from Europe and east coast ports brought many ethnic and religious groups to the region. As Indian lands were ceded to the government and Oklahoma provided land runs and lotteries, more land became available for white settlements increasing westward expansion.

County jurisdictions

All the Great Plains states use counties as the political jurisdiction. As more people headed west, new counties were created from existing counties. When a county was divided, the old county kept the records created previously. New records were created and held by the new county government. Before doing research in a county, find out when the county was created and what records may be held in the parent county.

Burned counties

When a county is referred to as a "burned county" it means that the area has suffered record loss. The Great Plains Region has had a variety of disasters where records were destroyed including, fires, floods, theft, and war.

Economy

The climate in the Great Plains Region is continental with cold winters and warm summers. The area has low precipitation and humidity with heavy winds in many areas. The region is agricultural, with semiarid grassland, cattle grazing, and ranching. The region also has coal, natural gas and oil reserves.

Helpful Resources general state and county

Research Wiki articles

[state name] United States Genealogy

[state name, county name] County

Helpful Resources history and background

[Treaty of Paris 1783](#)

[Louisiana Purchase](#)

[British Cession or Treaty of 1818](#)

[Texas Annexation of 1845](#)

[Homestead Act](#)

Helpful Resources migration

Research Wiki articles

[US Migration Trails and Roads](#)

[US Migration Canals](#)

[state name] migration

FamilySearch Webinars

[Religious Migration](#)

Other Resources

[1855 commercial map of the US with railroads, routes, and distances](#)

Helpful Resources burned counties

Research Wiki articles

[Burned Counties Research](#)

Key Records

Church Records

The United States is a country of religious diversity. The Great Plains was a melting pot of individuals from various countries and religions. The United States has never had a “state church” where records were required to be kept. Church records are an invaluable substitute for vital records. A church record may be the only record containing a birth, marriage, or death record of an ancestor. Religious groups in the area before 1900 were: Baptist, Catholic, Disciples of Christ, Episcopal, Methodist-Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Helpful Resources for church records

Research Wiki articles

[United States Church Records](#)

[state name] church records

[Gretna Green \(runaway marriages\)](#)

FamilySearch Webinars

[United States Church Records](#)

Other resources

[Cyndi's List: Religion & Churches](#)

[Congregational Library & Archives](#)

[Evangelical Lutheran Church of America](#)

[Presbyterian Historical Society](#)

Census Records

Census records are an invaluable tool in family history research. They provide the residence of a family during a specific period of time and may include relationships to the head of household. Other information that may be found in a census record are the approximate ages of individuals listed in the household, state or country of birth, marriage year or age at marriage of the parents, and occupations. Later censuses may include the year of immigration for each person and citizenship information for the head of household. Using the place of residence from the census, other records can be searched in the locality to find more information about the family.

Helpful Resources for census records

Research Wiki articles

[United States Census Records](#)

[\[state name\] census](#)

[American Indian Census Rolls](#)

[United States Indian Schedules](#)

FamilySearch Webinars

[U.S. Census Research, Techniques, and Strategies](#)

[United States Censuses](#)

Land Records

The availability of land attracted many immigrants to America and encouraged westward expansion. Land ownership was generally recorded in an area as soon as settlers began to arrive. Land records are used in family history research to learn where an individual lived and when he lived there. They may include information about other family members such as the names of a spouse, heir, other relatives, or neighbors. Land records may provide information about where a person lived previously, an occupation, military service, citizenship, or may give helpful clues to continue researching the family.

Helpful Resources for land records

Research Wiki articles

[United States Land and Property](#)

[\[state name\] Land and Property](#)

[Bureau of Land Management Tract Books](#)

[Homestead Records](#)

[Metes and Bounds](#)

[Rectangular Surveys](#)

FamilySearch Webinars

[United States Land Records](#)

[Homestead Records](#)

[U.S. Measurement and Distribution of Public Land States](#)

[Sections, Ranges and Townships](#)

Other resources

[Land Record Definitions](#)

[Bureau of Land Management: General Land Office Records search](#) index to first sale of land

Military Records

The Great Plains states were involved in several wars where its citizens may have served. See our Wiki pages for each state or a specific war to find resources to search.

Helpful Resources for military records

Research Wiki articles

[United States Military Records](#)

[\[state name\] Military Records](#)

[Indian Wars \(1780s-1890s\)](#)

[Civil War \(1861-1865\)](#)

[Mexican War \(1846-1848\)](#)

[Spanish-American War \(1898\)](#)

[World War I \(1917-1918\)](#)

[World War II \(1941-1945\)](#)

[US Military Bounty Land Warrants](#)

[Ages of Servicemen in Wars](#)

FamilySearch Webinars

[U.S. Military Records: Civil War](#)

[Over There: World War I Records Over Here](#)

[U.S. Military Records: Pre-WWI Pension Applications](#)

[Selective Service Records \(WWI\) Draft Cards and More](#)

Additional Great Plains records

Congress of the United States [American State Papers](#) contains early US history

[Bible records](#)

[County histories](#) can be very rich in family information. Many county histories have a biographical section included. Search by place, surname, or subject in the FamilySearch [Library](#)

[Catalog](#)

[Newspapers](#)

[Vital records](#)

NARA homestead records

[FamilySearch](#) and [Ancestry.com](#) for Nebraska

Grand Army of the Republic: a fraternal organization for service in the Union Army

[Grand Army of the Republic](#) and [Grand Army of the Republic post index by state](#)

[FamilySearch](#) has many GAR post records

National Archives Regional Branches

[National Archives Central Plains Region](#) branch at Kansas City has records from Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota.

[National Archives Southwest Region](#) branch at Fort Worth has records for Oklahoma

Order documents online through [Nara.gov](#)

State Overviews

Kansas

[Kansas Historical Society](#) and [Kansas Names](#)

[National Archives Branch at Kansas City](#)

Nebraska

[History Nebraska](#)

[Nebraska State Genealogical Society](#) and [Cemetery Search](#)

Nebraska Census indexes at [USGenNet](#)

North Dakota

[State Historical Society of North Dakota](#) and [Index to Pioneer Biographies](#)

[North Dakota State University Archives](#) and [Biography Index](#)

Oklahoma

[Oklahoma Land Openings map](#) from okhistory.org

[Oklahoma Historical Society](#) and Choctaw Nation 1890 census index

[Oklahoma Department of Libraries](#) and Digital Prairie search for [Confederate Pension images](#)

[Oklahoma 1890 Territorial census index](#) and [FamilySearch digital images](#)

[FamilySearch Native American Birth and Death Records, 1885-1940](#)

1890 Territorial Census [Cherokee Nation](#)

[Chickasaw Nation](#) and [Oklahoma Historical Society](#)

[Choctaw Nation](#) (Towson County only)

South Dakota

[South Dakota Historical Society](#) and Dakota Territory [1885 Civil War Veteran's Census](#)

[South Dakota Department of Health](#) and [South Dakota Birth Record Search](#)

FamilySearch Research Wiki Resources

[Learning Center](#), Helpful lessons: [FamilySearch Research Wiki: What it Can Do for You!](#) and [The Research Process](#)

State research pages: [Kansas](#), [Nebraska](#), [North Dakota](#), [Oklahoma](#), and [South Dakota Historical Records Collection](#)

[Library Catalog](#)